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National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD PENTAGON PRESS BRIEFING ROOM

June 24, 2021

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT
State of the Guard	▪ Army General Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief, National Guard Bureau

Introduction – Tracy O’Grady-Walsh (Moderator):

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us today to talk about the National Guard. General Daniel Hokanson, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, is here to discuss the new mission, vision and priorities he has set for over 450,000 soldiers and airmen of the National Guard. He will make an opening statement, and then I will call on you from here in the room, as well as from the call-in roster, and alternate between the two. You'll be able to ask one question, and then I will call on the next reporter so we can get through as many as possible. With that, I'd like to introduce to you General Daniel Hokanson. Sir, over to you.

Opening Statement – General Daniel R. Hokanson:

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on our National Guard. Let me start with a single number: 12 million, 12 million people. That represents moms, dads, grandparents, neighbors and friends who have received their COVID-19 vaccination from either National Guard soldiers or National Guard airmen. Although it is a significant number, it is just one number in the many missions we do every single day.

Another number is 21 million. That's the number of personnel days for all missions the National Guard performed in 2020. Whatever the mission -- combat deployments, COVID, wildfires, civil disturbances or severe storms, the National Guard answered every call in 2020 and 2021, as we have for the past 384 years.

As a combat reserve of the Army and the Air Force, we are manned, trained and equipped to fight our nation's wars. But in times of emergency, our people, training and equipment help us respond to our communities.



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Last June, more National Guard troops were mobilized than at any time since World War II. Nearly 120,000 soldiers and airmen were mobilized supporting combatant commanders overseas or in domestic operations here at home, and despite the COVID environment, we continued our military training and met every overseas deployment.

In January, in response to the attack on the Capitol, we mobilized and deployed over 26,000 National Guardsmen to D.C. within two weeks. Using organic National Guard air support and logistics, soldiers and airmen from every single state and territory arrived to help secure our 59th presidential inauguration. "Always ready, always there" is more than our motto; It's our promise.

This past year was an extraordinary one for the National Guard, and in the interest of time, I'd like to highlight just one weekend: Labor Day of '19 -- of 2020. That weekend, more than 64,000 National Guardsmen were on duty around the world. Roughly 20,000 were deployed across 34 nations in support of our combatant commanders. During the same weekend, more than 18,000 were helping their communities fight COVID-19, from manning testing sites, to supporting long-term care facilities, to working in food banks. More than 3,500 were helping their communities recover from Hurricane Laura in Texas and Louisiana. More than 2,600 were on our Southwest border, providing aviation and operational support to the Customs and Border Patrol. More than 1,500 were protecting the rights of peaceful protesters and safeguarding communities against violence in Georgia, Texas, Kentucky and Wisconsin. More than 1,100 were guarding America's skies, from pilots and maintainers manning the Aerospace Control Alert Mission at fighter and tanker bases across the country, to the five 24/7 command-and-control sites in the Continental United States, Alaska and Hawaii. More than 90 were operating our nation's ground-based missile defense sites in California and Alaska. That same week in Alaska, a team of Guardian Angel airmen were awarded the Wilderness Rescue of the Year by the American Red Cross of Alaska for rescuing two hikers, one who had fallen more than 100 feet off a cliff.

And still, in the same weekend, specially-modified C-130s from the California and Nevada Air National Guard, along with helicopters and unmanned aircraft from multiple states were fighting record wildfires. This included the dramatic rescue of 240 people trapped by wildfires in the Sierra National Forest by the California National Guard. This daring night rescue in heavy smoke was possible because our crews were equipped with modernized helicopters and the latest-generation night vision goggles. For their heroism and extraordinary achievement, the air crews were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.



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This one weekend tells a story of many weekends for the National Guard. Our country and our communities needed us, so the men and women of the National Guard left their families and their civilian jobs and proudly served as soldiers and airmen. Their selfless service is both important and inspiring.

In addition to our deployments overseas and operations here at home, we have also been busy enhancing international partnerships throughout the globe through our State Partnership Program. Over the last 27 years, the Department of Defense has formed state partnerships between 82 countries and our 54 states, territories and the District of Columbia. Through these partnerships, long-term, mutually-beneficial relationships are formed that further combatant command and U.S. Chief of Mission goals.

I recently returned from a trip to Africa, where I witnessed the signing ceremony of our newest partnership between Egypt and the state of Texas, as well as observed the Utah and Morocco state partnership program in action during Exercise African Lion 2021.

It is no surprise the National Guard was ready for the challenges we faced in 2020, and continue to face in 2021. The significant investment America has made over the last 20 years has transformed our organization from a Cold War strategic reserve to today's operational reserve, and clearly highlights the capability, capacity and readiness we bring to the Joint Force when the National Guard is resourced and modernized.

One out of every five men and women who wear our nation's uniform is a member of the National Guard, and that's one of the reasons I support premium-free health care for our service members. Whether they are serving our nation overseas or their communities here at home, it is important they have access to medical care so we can keep our promise to remain always ready, always there. With that, I welcome your questions.

Dialogue:

[NAME]

[QUESTION/RESPONSE]

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator) Thank you, General Hokanson. We'd like to start with A.P. on the phones- Lita Baldor, please.



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Reporter Lita Baldor

Hi, General. Thanks for doing this. Can you give us a little bit of specifics on the funding that is owed the National Guard? In several hearings this week, we have heard about how desperately the Guard across the country needs to be reimbursed for the funding. What will happen specifically in some of the states in July, August, if they do not get this reimbursement? Thank you.

General Daniel R. Hokanson

And, Lita, thank you. So if you look at the Operational Capital Response, and the number of troops we had in the duration, it cost about \$521 million. And what we were able to do is use our funding for operations and maintenance as well as some of our pay accounts to basically front-load that money so that we could pay our soldiers and airmen while they were here in the nation's capitol. However, that funding is very significant -- that's a significant amount to any organization, especially the National Guard. And so, for us to be able to meet our training, and operations, and maintenance requirements for the rest of the year, we will need to be reimbursed that funding. And I know you asked what the potential ramifications might be.

So if we don't get that funding fairly soon we'll have to look at not only August but also September, the last two months in the fiscal year of either curtailing completely or drastically reducing our National Guard drill weekends, and annual training as well as our operational maintenance. So it will have a very significant impact on National Guard readiness if we're not able to resolve that in a timely manner.



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Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator) Yes Ma'am

Reporter

So last year the Guard was -- the operational tempo was so high essentially, that some of your TAGs started openly pleading for an increase in end strength in order to meet so many of those missions. And of course the president's budget now requests dropping 500 soldiers and airmen from the National Guard. How are you guys going to be able to make ends meet with fewer people? Are you going to advocate to change that number, or advocate not to be called on so much -- basically, in order to balance that?

General Daniel R. Hokanson

Well, thank you. So we work very closely with our adjutants general and look at the OPTEMPO within the state. Because what we're really trying to balance is for our Guardsmen, their civilian career, their military career and their family, and try and find the really -- for lack of a better term, the rheostat, where we can allow them to maintain that and continue to serve in the National Guard.

And so we look back at 2020, some states had a significant increase in the amount of OPTEMPO that they had previously had, and so they've asked for additional force structure. Those decisions are made at the Secretary of the Army and Secretary of the Air Force level. And of course like all organizations, we would like to grow if possible. When you look at that within each state, however, we work with the states to make sure that they have the personnel. And if it exceeds our capability we have emergency management assistance compacts where they can reach out to other states to draw those resources in -- very similar to what we do during hurricanes.



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In the case of one of the Gulf States where they're hit and it exceeds their capability, we meet every year beforehand to identify those forces that could come and meet those requirements. So until that time we'll continue to use the emergency compacts we have between the states, but we're always ready to grow if the service secretaries agree to it.

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator) All right, on the phone, Steve Beynon, military.com

Reporter, Steve Beynon

General, appreciate you taking the time out today to do this. I've been talking to a lot of Guardsmen across a lot of different states. They're just not getting access to gear to train for the ACFT.

It seems like the gear was sent to the states, it's locked up at some battalion headquarters, inaccessible to a lot of armories at the moment. And these Guardsmen, they're having to go to crossfit gyms or find their own equipment, they're not getting reimbursed or anything from the Guard. Is there any plans to get more gear to armories, or help soldiers pay for finances related to their health and fitness?

General Daniel R. Hokanson

So, Steve, when we look at the new Army Combat Fitness Test, we're fortunate to be able to field all of 100 percent of our equipment to all the National Guard units. Now that it's in the system, the units can now additionally order other sets of equipment or augment what they currently have.

And with any new test, what we're trying to do is really determine the best way to do this, and I've -- I've seen various states come at it from different directions, and within the Army National Guard, we're trying to share those best practices, number one, to make sure that our soldiers have the -- the ability to train for the test, and then



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when we do conduct the test, that it goes as smooth as possible and we can get everybody through in a -- in a timely manner. There's been a lot of great innovative approaches. I know there's some apps out there that you can download to give you events to train every day to get ready for that. I was fortunate our entire staff took it a couple of weeks ago and it's a -- it's significantly different from the other one but I would tell you each and every one of us actually felt like it was a -- a very good challenge and it was a very -- a very good test. But as we go forward, we need everybody to have that test by August 31st so we can actually get more data on what the actual scoring is and the capabilities of each and every one of our soldiers and also to identify those events that they need to practice on. And so when we look at this, we're watching it very closely, staying in communication with the states to make sure that we can make it possible for everybody to have the equipment when they need it and so they can train and be successful in that test.

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator) Thank you. Here in the room? Yes. Sir

Reporter, Abraham Mahshie

Abraham Mahshie. Washington Examiner. Thank you, General. Sir, there's been a high demand on the Guard in the last year. You described a range that's happening in one -- just one weekend. There's been a lot of reports lately that this is going to be the new normal. I wondered if you -- if you can reflect on can Guard members -- current Guard members, future Guard members expect that this is the kind of demands that will be placed on them? And then also, sir, would you comment on your vision for how Space Guardians would be used? What type of civilian jobs would you be recruiting for, would you benefit from?

General Daniel R. Hokanson

Yeah, thank you, Abraham. So when we look at the -- the demands on the National Guard -- and, I mean, last year was a great example. Not only did we have the COVID-19



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pandemic, we had a historic hurricane season and also a historic fire season. One thing that we have done is we've become a lot better at how we do this, and I'll use fires as an example. So previously, prior to a hurricane season, we would all meet, identify the states most likely to suffer from a hurricane, identify their shortages.

So this year is the first time we've actually done the same thing with wildfires. And in March, we had a meeting with the national interagency fire committees to really look at -- at what capabilities may be deployed and what capabilities are going to be here at home, and then identify those shortages so we can train those units so that they're ready to fill in and -- and help with wired -- wildfires in the -- in a time that they need them there. So that's one thing.

When we look at the future, however, we -- we're not really sure what it's going to look like, but what we have to do is be prepared to meet whatever that demand signal is. And so what we try and tell our folks is hey, you know, we go back to our motto -- Always Ready, Always There. We don't know what -- what we're going to be asked to do but we've got to be ready to do that.

And when we look at the OPTEMPO of the past year -- and I'll use the Capitol response as an example -- I spent a lot of evenings out there with our soldiers and airmen talking to them. And universally, they -- they said "hey, this is what we signed up to do." For many of them, it was their first trip to the Nation's Capitol but they felt very proud that -- to do their part. Now, over time, we'll see. We keep in very close touch with each of the states to help, you know, once again find that balance between civilian career, military career and family so that we can sustain that.



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One indication we used is our recruiting and retention. And, you know, having previously served as a Director of the Army Guard, you know, a lot of times, the end of the fiscal year is the end of September and we would meet our -- our recruiting goal in late September. But with respect to the Army National Guard, we met our recruiting goal in May of this year, which is historically early, which shows that a lot of our Guardsmen have re-enlisted -- re-enlisted or decided to stay within the organization, and also our recruiting's been up, as well, and we're very close tracking on the -- on the Air National Guard, as well. So I would say based on the ability for us to recruit and retain, that's a good indicator that -- that folks are aware of that. Now, with respect to the -- the potential Space National Guard, folks may not realize but the National Guard has actually been conducting space missions for over 25 years. We have over 1,000 space professionals in the National Guard and we really look forward to them transitioning from the Air National Guard to hopefully a -- a Space National Guard in the near future. And with mission sets like that, many of them are already -- work in the civilian industry, and that's one of the great benefits of the National Guard, is we leverage not only their military training but many of them bring their civilian skill sets to work, which makes our organizations even better and vice versa. A lot of the leadership skills and training that they receive in the military help benefit their employers and their companies. So for us, it's a -- it's a win on both accounts.

Reporter

Do you have any specifics on civilian areas or more of a -- more broadly, like, what the vision might be for changes?

General Daniel R. Hokanson

Yes. So with respect to changes, any growth or changes in mission sets will be directed by the -- the Secretary of the Air Force, as the Secretary for the Space Force. Under our current mission sets, we plan to -- to basically continue those until some time in the future, but in many cases,



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you'll see that they're located near businesses or areas that have really compatible civilian jobs, as well, and that's one advantage our Guardsmen -- they -- they -- they're Guardsmen for a reason, because they want to have that -- the civilian career and their military career.

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator)

On the phone -- Alex Horton, Washington Post?

Reporter Alex Horton

Hey, thanks for doing this. So my question starts 50,000 years ago -- or 57,000 years ago, when Minot won the oldest living human -- that is important to -- to understand the links between humans and Neanderthals -- died somewhere in a cave in what we now call Israel. That number is important because that's how many years was spent by Guardsmen on duty in 2020 -- 50,000 years -- 57,000 years worth of -- of time.

When -- when I asked you about this in March, about the burn rate and assessments on what that has done for the force, what is needed to refit and assess what kind of wear and tear this put on, you know, people's careers, equipment, you know, their civilian side of the house, you didn't indicate there was any kind of assessment or -- or learning opportunity there. I'm curious if the answer's different now, a few months later? You had mentioned that -- just now that recruiting and retention is a good sign that people are emboldened by the mission. We're also coming in -- out of one of the worst economies since 1929. So perhaps that is also playing a role in -- in people re-enlisting. So I'm curious to -- to hear, you know, once you're kind of climbing out of this -- this unprecedented year of the Guard, what is your deeper look at the costs bared by your people and what you intend to do as you look to -- to fulfill a -- a -- a deeper mission set in the future?



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General Daniel R. Hokanson

So, Alex, thanks for that question. And when we look broadly across the organization -- of course, you mentioned recruiting and retention. That's one of the key indicators. But for us also, it's -- it's really looking at a lot of the -- every time I visit a state, I -- I usually meet with the senior leaders to have a conversation about them and what they have learned throughout their career, and then I also meet with the recruiters to hear what they're hearing from the young men and women that are coming into the organization. So it -- it kind of gives me a -- a broad picture of what the system has produced and what the system is bringing in and the motivations behind that.

And one interesting thing that we see is when we look at folks, why they come in, number one, it's a sense to serve. Many come in for educational benefits and for the training. And what we're also finding is some -- what we would traditionally consider older adults in their late 20s, early 30s that are now coming into the National Guard because they want to make a difference. And so we've noticed that the demographic has shifted slightly, but not significantly. But for us, we need to make sure that we -- we very much stay in tune with that.

And the other thing is going back -- and you highlighted a couple of things when you look at the economy over the past year as well -- is making sure that we're well-connected with our states to understand those environments where the economy may be really starting to pick up again, and allow the Guardsmen that need to get back to their -- to their civilian careers, and sometimes those civilian careers will ask more of them than they had in the past as they -- they get up and -- they get up to speed again. So we have to really work very closely with the adjutants general so that we can meet their requirements and do everything we can to reduce the burden on our Guardsmen to do those mission sets that are critical to our nation and/or our community, but then, and sometimes get away from some of those



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mission sets so that we reduce the burden on our personnel, and it's -- it's an ongoing thing that we really have to monitor very closely every single day. And really, it goes down to our leaders at the lowest level having that level of communication with our Guardsmen so they understand, you know, the pressures that they feel between their civilian career, their military career and their family.

And one thing otherwise that I -- I mentioned early in my opening statements is -- is the -- how much I support, really, TRICARE Reserve Select for all of our servicemembers. And this is one of those things that we did learn over the past year, is when you go from a -- a civilian career and you get on orders for more than 31 days, you go to TRICARE healthcare. But then, in many cases, you may have to switch providers. And if we had TRICARE Reserve Select for all of our servicemembers all the time, they'd be able to maintain that continuity of care, and also, the employers and the families would know that if they're injured either on or off duty, that they're going to be taken care of so they can return to duty, return to work and also, be there to help provide for their families.

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator) In the room? Luis

Reporter, Luis Martinez

Hi, Sir. Luis Martinez with ABC News.

If I could ask you two questions about, first, about January 6th and the reaction to that. You mentioned the \$521 million gap right now. Have you received assurances from members of the Hill that you will be receiving that compensation either this fiscal year, or if not, in the -- in the next fiscal year? And what is the difference if you get it now, as opposed to getting it next? And then I have a -- a different question.

General Daniel R. Hokanson

So we were working very closely with our congressional representatives, and I know, as the Department of Defense



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is, as well. And it's critical for us to get it this year because of the funding will be required for us to complete not only our drills, but all operations and training we have scheduled in this fiscal year.

Reporter, Luis Martinez

And then the response -- five months long, I think it was. A lot of coordination. I think this is probably the largest collective National Guard response that we've seen in the continental United States when you have literally all of the states contributing. What were some of the lessons learned in -- from that response in how you prepare for something like that in the future? And also, how do you -- how do you bridge this disconnect that there seems to be between the popular perception of what -- of how the National Guard can be used as a quick response force versus, you know, how it actually operates and that -- how the interpretation is that, yes, the response here was actually quick but very different.

General Daniel R. Hokanson

Luis, thank you. So if you go back to the -- to the initial response itself and the things that we learned, what we found is the -- the investment that our nation has made, really, since 9/11 in the National Guard in terms of manning, training and equipping, it has produced a force that can literally do just about anything we're asked to do. And our ability to move 26,000 Guardsmen from, really, every single state, territory, to include Alaska and Guam, came here, as well. Our capability there is number one, because we had Air National Guard organic assets to help move. But also, our personnel are used to -- to mobilize and deploying, and also, the support we got across the 54 as result of January 6th. Every single state, as I mentioned, all three territories and D.C. provided personnel to meet every single requirement that we were given.

So that's one thing that we learned -- the investment that our nation has made really made that possible, and the training and -- and professionalism of our force. When you



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look at the -- the responsiveness of the National Guard -- and what we try and tell folks is, you know, our motto is "Always Ready, Always There." But the majority of our personnel have civilian jobs, and so for them to leave their civilian job and return to their armory, get their equipment, get a briefing and sometimes last-minute training on what specifically they'll be asked to do -- we really look at that as a 24-hour timeframe. We're not a SWAT team. We're not law enforcement. We're soldiers and airmen trained -- manned, trained and equipped to fight our nation's wars. But the leadership and the training that we get, also, as I mentioned earlier, allow us to do just about anything our communities ask. But we can't get into the -- the perception that we're immediate response because we're just not resourced to do that, and so we really rely, obviously, on -- on local law enforcement, and if it exceeds their capability, in a timely manner, normally 24 hours, is when we can start marshaling our organization to help support.

Reporter, Luis Martinez

OK, just to follow up -- did it make sense to establish national response forces that could tighten up that timeframe?

General Daniel R. Hokanson

So when I look at that, Luis, many of these, I think, are actually a law enforcement mission set, and therefore, I think it's most appropriate to have law enforcement do that. When you look specifically at the National Guard, our full-time forces are really there to -- to really train and administer our organizations so they're ready to do their war-fighting mission. They're not specifically designed for anything like that. Thank you.

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh (Moderator)

All right. Any last questions? Thank you very much. Have a great afternoon, and thank you to everybody on the phone, as well. Have a good day.



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